

## #4. The result of being grafted in is to use the gifts that God has given to you (12/05/24)

Reading: Romans 12:3-8

Whilst the focus of the talk on Sunday 12th May was on verses 3-8, it is always good to see any given passage in its context and in this case, the wider context would include reading verses 1-2 of Romans 12. (Verses 9 onwards are also related, and the penultimate question sneaks into v 9!)

Chapter 12 v 3 onwards (and in this particular case v 3-8) is concerned with the practical outworkings of Paul's urgent call in v 2 for followers of Jesus 'to be transformed by the renewing of your mind'. We are a new creation with a new focus in life. His letter helps us to see what that might mean in practice.

1. V3 - How do you think of yourself? In this modern age of social media, do you aim to have lots of 'followers'? How do you think Jesus saw himself? Read Matthew 20 v 20 -28 – what lessons can we draw from this?
2. Paul is adamant that we are 'one body, and each member belongs to all the others' (v 4-5). Do you see yourself as part of 'one body'? How would you describe that body? In a world that prizes individualism, how important is it to be a part of a larger whole? Does being part of a wider body bring with it individual responsibilities? If so, what would these be?
3. Paul says that 'each member belongs to all the others' Do you feel a sense of belonging? Does it encourage you to see yourself as part of a larger whole? How can we help others to believe that they too 'belong'?
4. Paul indicates that we each have gifts that we can 'bring to the party', and implies that the body as a whole will function better when we use them. The list in v 6-8 is not exclusive, with the main point being that each of us has a role to play. Do you think these gifts are solely for church use, or in the wider society and web of relationships that we find ourselves in? What do you think are your gifts? Are you putting them to use? If you haven't thought about it before, how would you go about discovering your God-given gifts?
5. Straying a little into the surrounding context, what two things should underly our exercise of these gifts (12 v 1 and 12. v9) (ie self-sacrifice to honour God; and love of one another) Do you think this is this a practical outworking of the two Great Commandments in Mathew 22 v 35-40?
6. What have you learnt from the talk on Sunday and discussing this passage in Romans 12 3-8? What are you still unclear about?

## #3. Living Sacrifices and Be Transformed (05/05/24)

Readings: Romans 11:33 – 12:2

1. In Romans Chapter 11:33-36 Paul recognises who God is, his nature, and then gives praise to God for being these things (a doxology – worship).
  - a. Read the passage and discuss your thoughts on Paul’s two declarations (v33) and his two questions (vv34-35)
  - b. These phrases all highlight one thing – the difference between God and people. What differences can you think of between us and God?
2. Richard said, “it is exactly God’s incomprehensibility that is the basis for Paul’s trust in God. We can put our trust in God because he is so vastly and incomprehensibly different from human failings.”
  - a. What do you think of this statement? How easy do you find it to trust God?

Paul introduces the first “as a result...” phrase of being part of the God-cultivated Olive Tree (God’s family) and it is in two parts which we will look at in turn.

**Present your bodies as living sacrifices**

1. The Greeks at the time of this letter would have been shocked by Paul discussing the importance of the body. They considered the body to be an embarrassment and burden; a tomb to escape from. But this is not the Christian view of the body.
  - a. Why do you think the body is important to God?
  - b. Do we struggle to think of our bodies as important? Why might this be?
2. The imagery of sacrifice is intense, it signifies the total giving of our bodies; not keeping anything back. But Richard said there is a difference, “unlike the sacrifices which were killed upon the altar, it is upon giving our lives wholly to God that we become truly alive – as we give our bodies and lives to God we receive new life from God, through his Spirit which makes us more alive than we can possibly imagine.”
  - a. What do you think of this statement and about becoming alive upon the altar?
  - b. Richard said that our bodies are a barometer of our attitudes – they reveal and display what is going on inside. How might this work and what does it look like?
    - i. If you watch the YouTube video Richard used two descriptions of how our bodies might reveal what is going on inside (if you can re-watch this 48:29 – 50:00). What do you think about these descriptions?

**Be transformed by the renewing of your mind**

1. God does not only ask for our bodies but also our minds. It is not just what we do that is important but how we think. For it is from our thoughts and attitudes that our deeds grow. What we feed our mind with comes out in our words and behaviours.
  - a. Think about what this means using the “Carnation Experiment” illustration (image on next page)
  - b. What do you “feed upon”? What do you nourish yourself with? What do you draw up into your petals?
2. Read Philippians 4:8-9. What encouragement does this give us to think and do? Share your thoughts.

**Natural Imitators**

1. We, as people, are natural imitators; looking for a model to follow, to copy. Paul says there are only two to choose from. The Present Age (this world, this age) & The Age to Come and that the two models are founded on such different principles that there is no compromise between them. As branches of the Olive Tree, we are called to “not conform” to this world, this present age but to live by what God in his mercy has done for us (the age to come). Paul writes that this requires transformation, but what does he mean?
  - a. What do you think of when you hear “transformation”? Transformers or Butterflies? (images on next page)
    - i. One is a rearrangement of parts but not much has changed really, the other is a total and whole transformation into something radically new. Discuss these differences.
  - b. This transformation is dependent on what we feed ourselves – The Spirit and the Word
    - i. How good are we at feeding ourselves in this way?

The Reason

1. The reason for all of this is found at the end of 12:2, “so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect”.
  - a. Where would you like to know God’s will? Share this in your group and then spend some time praying together to hear God’s will for you in your lives.
  - b. You may want to end by sharing the blessing that Richard used at the end of the service which recognises the importance of our bodies and our minds.

Jesus, bless their feet, may they bring good news.

Bless their legs, may they carry on in times of suffering.

Bless their backs, may they be strong enough to bear the burdens of others.

Bless their arms to hold the lonely, and their hands to do good work.

Bless their necks, may they turn their heads toward the poor.

Bless their ears to discern truth, their eyes to see beauty, and their mouths to speak encouragement.

Bless their minds, may they grow wise in their knowledge of you.

And finally, bless their hearts, may they grow to love you — and all that you have made — in the right order.

Amen.



## #2. The Olive Tree (14/04/24)

Readings: Romans 11:17-24 (Romans 9:30-33, 10:1-4, 9-13)

1. Read Romans 9:30-33. It was clear that Paul felt that many thought that to receive God's salvation they needed to work for it; in some way to earn it.
  - a. In what (subtle) ways can we make it about what we do, rather than what Jesus has already done for us?
  - b. Our faith in Jesus, if real, should make a real difference to how we live our lives. How can the outward expression of this, become about works, rather than about faith?
  - c. What do you do to ensure that your relationship with God is about your faith in his Son, rather than your achievements or failures?
2. Read 10:1-4 and 9-13. Here Paul argues that salvation can't be achieved through the law, but only through faith in Jesus.
  - a. How do you understand 10:4?
  - b. How do you understand 10:9?
  - c. What are the perceived challenges today of speaking of the faith we have in Jesus (10:10)? What has been your own experience of doing so?
3. Keith said that 'God is inclusive' and that access to Him is not limited by ethnicity, gender, age, culture, etc.
  - a. How do you understand the inclusivity of God?
  - b. What are the 'limits' to God's inclusivity? (10:12b-13)
4. Read 11:22. In your routine prayers and thinking are you more likely to consider the kindness or sternness of God?
  - a. If there is an imbalance in your thinking about God, where does it originate, and what are the issues with being in relationship with only a God who is kind, or stern.
5. The olive tree is a very striking metaphor for our spiritual relationship with God. Imagining your own relationship with God as an olive tree (or a branch on the tree).
  - a. How healthy looking is your branch?
  - b. In what ways is it connected to the trunk and roots?
  - c. How is it routinely fed by the nourishing sap fed from the roots?
6. In Paul's time the established natural branches were the Jews. Today, after 2000+ years of Christianity we are the established branches, and even the trunk which feeds newly grafted branches nourishment from the tree roots.
  - a. How are we ensuring that others (newbies who may be appear different from us) can be readily grafted on?
  - b. How do we ensure that we who are established continue to receive from the roots of our faith so that we grow and don't become smug or complacent?
  - c. How do we ensure that newbies are able to grow and be nourished?

## #1. The Olive Tree – Introduction (07/04/24, Richard Saint)

Readings: Romans 9:6-16, 25-26

1. Before we embark on Part 2 of our tour of Romans, cast your mind back to April 2023 to Part One. We examined together topics like, Justification, Sanctification, Our Adoption, Our Humanity, New Family, Reality, Status, Comfort, and new life.
  - a. What, if anything, has stayed with you from that series? Has anything been particularly impactful to you?
2. Richard re-introduced Paul's overarching theme, and driving force, of the letter to the Romans – The Gospel, The Good News.
  - a. How would you describe or explain the Good News to someone?
3. Paul writes, (Rm 1:16), "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for **it is the power of God** for **salvation to everyone who believes.**"
  - a. What do you think of Paul's description?  
You may want to split it into the three parts (highlighted above).

This week, we are particularly celebrating in the word, "everyone". This understanding of who salvation was for, was a massive shift from what had previously been understood.

In this passage from Romans, Paul first introduces the idea of God's narrowing, before opening the idea of God's expansion plan.

4. God's narrowing relates to the fact that being "God's chosen people" was never an automatically inherited condition, it isn't something hereditary. It was always about God's choice. God chose Abraham, God chose Isaac, God chose Jacob. Not because they were deserving, or the best, brightest, strongest, or most numerous. Just simply God's choice. What do you think of this?

One thing to remember is that it is not that God loved *only* his chosen people. It is not to do with love or hate (these words from the passage relate to contrasts rather than absolutes). We know God loves all his creation. It is to do with being set apart for a special purpose. God's chosen people were set apart for a special purpose (not that they always achieved this). You may want to take some time to discuss this and think this through.

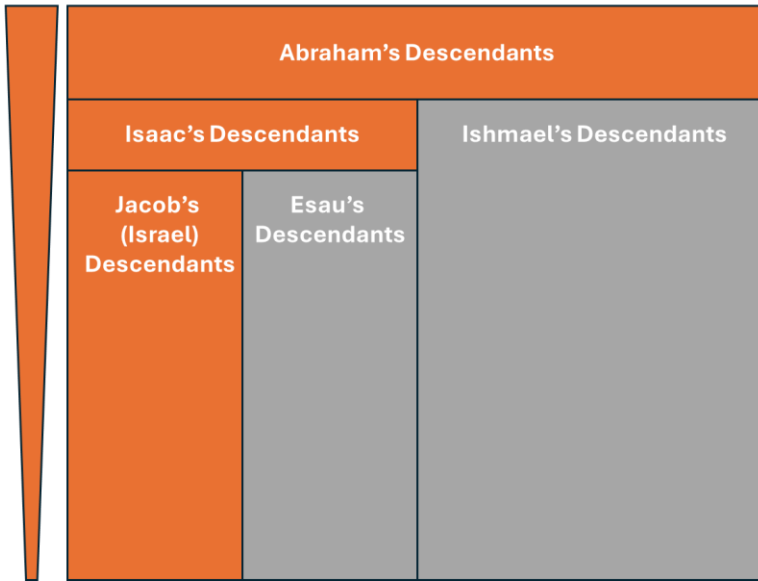
5. God's expansion plan was visible (if not enacted) even at the time of Abraham. Paul writes (Gal 3:6-9), "Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith." God was always going to include Gentiles in his salvation plan.
  - a. What do you think about the fact that God's plan of salvation is now available to all?
  - b. Take some time to thank God and praise him for his choice and plan of inclusion, making his invitation to accept salvation available to all.

Richard finished by introducing the "Casual Conjunctive Adverbial" – words that link an action to the cause for that action (Consequently... As a result... Therefore... Accordingly...)

Richard's point was that the choice to follow Jesus, to accept God's plan of salvation includes a casual conjunctive adverbial, there is a consequence of that choice. These consequences are what we will be looking at over this series.

6. Take some time to think about, and share with each other, what you consider some of the consequence of following might be.
7. The choice to follow is not the end, it is only the beginning. What comes next is the call to discipleship. "What follows the choice is the decision to follow where God leads."
  - a. What do you think of this statement describing discipleship?

## God's Narrowing



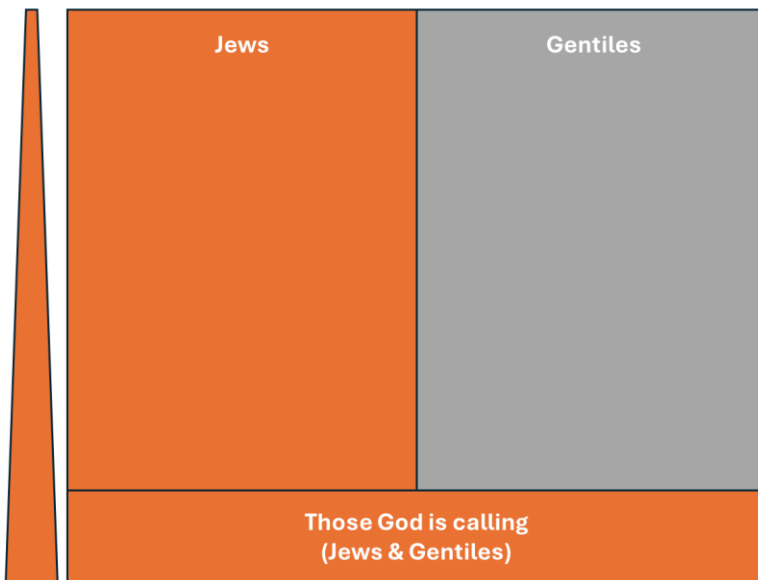
God's People

Not God's People

Rm 9:6-7

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham simply because they are his offspring, but “through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”

## God's Expansion Plan



God's People

Not God's People

Rm 9:24-26

including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? As indeed he says in Hosea, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘beloved.’” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they shall be called children of the living God.”